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THIRD WAY VALUES AND POST-SCHOOL EDUCATION POLICY

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Abstract

Analyses of emerging New Labour policy and practice in the post-compulsory education and training sector have been centrally concerned with the role of 'third way' values and politics in the formulation and development of projects and initiatives. Alternative interpretations of the 'third way' conception are examined and located against the background of some flagship schemes, particularly the New Deal Welfare to Work and the University for Industry learndirect initiatives. It is concluded that policies influenced by third way notions involve more rather than less state involvement and centralism than neo-liberal strategies of the past. This New Labour statism - arguably different from both Old Left and New Right centralism - could, conceivably, be justified in terms of achieving the socio-ethical strands of current policy concerned with social inclusion and communitarian approaches to the distribution of educational goods and services in the face of the forces of globalization.

Introduction

The election of the Labour government in 1997 not only brought about a new political administration but also, as Fairclough (2000:21) notes, a whole new:

vision of the world, partly actual, partly potential. It includes representations of the economy, of work, of crime, of the family, and so forth. It also includes representations of politics and government as ways of changing the world - specifically of what is claimed to be a 'new politics', the politics of the 'Third Way'.

The attempt to steer a course between a 'neo-liberal model and a social capitalist model' of politics is forming itself as the 'intellectual bedrock' (Hodgson & Spours, 1999:8) of the New Labour project. Halpin (1999) argues that the new 'third way' (TW) politics offers real opportunities for transcending the old discredited polarities and generating genuine political alternatives. Although the new politics - partly because it is still being distilled and refined as emergent New Labour policy translates ideals and theory into practice -

has proved difficult to pin down, there now seems to be enough exposition, analysis and critical discourse to attempt to locate the key themes within an educational framework. Central to the debate - in addition to the New Labour policy documents - are the writings of Giddens (1998,2000), his critics and other commentators on the developing debate in this sphere. This literature will be analysed with a view to constructing a coherent account of TW politics and values before examining the implications for post-compulsory education and training (PCET).

In the background, and sometimes the foreground, will be the key question of whether the so-called new politics - incorporating discourses on the economy, culture, and society in general, as well as education - really does mark a new direction and break with the past or whether current trends are, essentially, still 'dominated by neo-liberalism' (Hill,2000:11). The principal line of argument is that – although neo-liberalism does, contrary to much popular belief (Gray,1998; Scott,2000), involve elements of state intervention – TW values and politics require more centralist and statist control of education and the economy than the Conservative politics of the 1980s and 1990s. Moreover, although the socially inclusive elements of current lifelong learning policies are generally subordinate to economistic aims, the social purposes of education and training have an integral place in TW politics in a way which makes them distinctively different from earlier forms of neo-liberalism.

Third Way Values and Politics

Although not in the fullest sense one of the classical 'essentially contested' concepts (such as freedom, religion and democracy) discussed by Gallie (1964), TW constructions are - like Wittgenstein's famous analysis of games in terms of 'family resemblances' (1974:31-2) - clearly subject to a number of overlapping and criss-crossing interpretations. Giddens (1998:vii) begins his discussion by explaining that the TW 'is if no particular significance in and of itself' and 'has been used many times before

in the past history of social democracy'. Kellner (1998:15) accepts the social-democratic origins and claims that the basic strategy can best be captured by the idea of 'mutualism' which 'offers a way out of the sterile argument between state ownership and private enterprise'. In a similar vein Leadbetter (1998:15) explains that the 'central ethic of the Third Way is simple and traditional: co-operative self-improvement'. He goes on to elaborate the approach in terms of a politics which:

encourages people to recognise their shared needs and the potential for shared solutions. It promotes co-operation and collaboration, as well as ambition and striving. This is not wishy-washy political correctness. The most knowledge-intensive sectors of the economy, software and bio-technology, thrive on a mix of competition and collaboration.

For Giddens (1998:64-5) the 'overall aim of third way politics should be to help citizens pilot their way through the major revolutions of our time: globalization, transformations in personal life and our relationship to nature'; third way politics 'looks for a new relationship between the individual and the community, a redefinition of rights and obligations'. This is followed by helpful lists (the listing of positive and favourable concepts and values - such as 'fairness, justice, the equal worth and dignity of all' - often without elaboration or justification is, as Fairclough notes [2000:46,53], a key characteristic of New Labour discourse) of TW values and principles. Values include 'equality, freedom as autonomy, no rights without responsibilities and no authority without democracy', and the 'third way programme' incorporates the 'radical centre, an active civil society, the democratic family, the new mixed economy, positive welfare and the cosmopolitan nation' (Giddens, 1998:66,70). The ultimate aim of the programme is the 'social investment state' which 'defines equality as inclusion and inequality as exclusion' (ibid:102).

More recently, in response to a host of criticisms of his original thesis - principally, that the TW is an 'amorphous political project, difficult to pin down and lacking in

direction' that it 'fails to sustain the proper outlook of the left and...lapses into a form of conservatism', that it 'accepts the basic framework of neoliberalism, especially as concerns the global marketplace', and that it 'has no distinctive economic policy, other than allowing the market to rule the roost'(Giddens,2000:22-25) - Giddens re-iterates the 'fundamentals of third way politics' (ibid:50-54). The key defining features are expressed in terms of :

- i) an acceptance of the 'logic of 1989 and after' that the old left-right divisions are no longer feasible or useful;
- ii) a belief that the 'three key areas of power - government, the economy and the communities of civil society- all need to be constrained in the interests of social solidarity and social justice';
- iii) the construction of a 'new social contract based on the theorem 'no rights without responsibilities';
- iv) the development of a 'wide-ranging supply side policy which seeks to reconcile economic growth mechanisms with structural reform of the welfare state';
- v) the creation of a 'diversified society based upon egalitarian principles';
- vi) taking globalization seriously by seeking to 'transform existing global institutions and supporting the creation of new ones'.

The Third Way and the Global Economy

The last point concerning globalization requires special emphasis and attention since it is a central theme – not just in Giddens' arguments about education and the economy – but in New Labour's general lifelong learning policy. A distinctive feature of TW politics is that - whether the subject is education, health, crime or welfare - the agenda is always determined by economic considerations generally and the global market in particular (in addition, of course, to the considerable political and ideological legacy of the New Right; Hodgson & Spours,1999). Thus, although political points may appear to be ostensibly

about welfare, the family, community or social inclusion, the debate sooner or later returns to the impact of the global economy on all aspects of life in Britain. Education policy statements provide excellent examples of this tendency. Introducing the government's radically new policies on lifelong learning, the Secretary of State for education and employment observed that:

Learning is the key to prosperity – for each of us as individuals, as well as for the nation as a whole. Investment in human capital will be the foundation of success in the knowledge-based global economy of the twenty-first century...As well as securing our economic future learning ...helps make ours a civilised society, develops the spiritual side of our lives and promotes active citizenship (DfEE,1998a:7).

The ordering of priorities here leaves us with little doubt about the primary purposes of developing the learning society. Similarly, in the report of the National Advisory Council for Education and Training Targets (NACETT) we are informed that the:

primary purpose of the new targets is to *make Britain competitive internationally*. But they will also play a vital role in *promoting social cohesion*. Those two goals need not be in conflict with each other; sustained economic success, for example, is essential if we are to reduce dependency on the State and make work pay (NACETT,1998:5; original emphasis).

Thus, although economistic considerations are clearly primary, the social purposes of education and training are invariably attached to competitiveness arguments in a way which emphasises their interdependence. Admittedly the social capital perspective is often presented in a rather utilitarian and technicist fashion as in the Secretary of State's introduction to the recent report of the National Skills Task Force. Mr Blunkett observes that:

As we move into the new century, skills and learning must become the key determinants of the economic prosperity and social cohesion of our country. Knowledge and skills are now the key drivers of innovation and change. Economic performance depends increasingly on talent and creativity. And in this new economy, it is education and skills which shape the opportunities and rewards available to individuals. Higher skills bring better prospects and higher earnings (DfEE,2000a:3).

When the Secretary of State tells us later that 'equality of opportunity is not simply a moral objective – it is an economic imperative'(ibid.) , we are left in no doubt that references to moral and social values are merely subordinate, and that economic considerations have overriding priority in the lifelong learning plans. In the social cohesion envisaged here, people seem to relate to each other – not primarily as neighbours, community members or citizens – but as (potential) owners/recipients of employability skills striving for survival in the harsh climate of the global market. In fact, the reality-rhetoric gap is at its widest here since the scramble for security as new technology makes traditional occupational knowledge and skills redundant leads to, as Gray (1998) puts it, the 're-proletarianization of much of the industrial working class and the de-bourgeoisification of the former middle classes'(p.72). Such developments make the goal of social cohesion all the more difficult to achieve. The reality often is, as Gray reminds us, that:

In very country the new and more volatile strain of capitalism is transforming economic life. The impact of anarchic global markets on the economic cultures of continental Europe institutionalizes high levels of structural unemployment. In these societies the principal source of social division is unequal access to work (p.74).

All this goes to explain the dominance of economic interpretations of all the current problems facing Britain, particularly the all-encompassing project of fighting social exclusion (or promoting its opposite). For Fairclough (2000:65), the 'long standing Labour Party objective of greater equality has been displaced in New Labour politics by the objective of greater social inclusion'. If we add to this the fact that models of social inclusion are almost always constructed in terms of the knowledge, skills, values and cultural deficiencies of excluded groups, then the importance of the educational strand of TW politics is brought to the fore.

Locating the Third Way

Arguments which seek to show that the TW either is or is not like the Old Left or New Right politics leave themselves open to charges of pedantic irrelevance which only supporters or critics of those positions can have an interest in. It could be argued that the only thing that matters is the impact that New Labour (or any other government) policies have on education, the economy or society. However, this view is itself far too simplistic since the policy-making is mediated and forged through the language and discourse of political debate. Fairclough's (2000) painstaking analysis of New Labour language and policy discourse, for instance, makes much of the 'reality-rhetoric dichotomy' (arguably, a feature of all political language) in every sphere of activity. Yet the point of analysis is not simply to demonstrate linguistic discrepancies for, as Fairclough reminds us, the 'reality-rhetoric dichotomy provides a basis for political contestation and resistance'. He goes on to argue that:

Part of what makes politics possible and inevitable is the fact that gaps arise between rhetoric and reality and become visible to people. The politics of language, the politics of the gaps between reality and rhetoric, is a fundamental part of politics (155).

Although all politics might be said to consist of compromises between different positions, TW strategies are, for the most part, exclusively of this nature since their essence is constructed through locating a middle way between or synthesis of rival or oppositional perspectives. Consequently, in addition to the list-making tendency noted earlier, the TW 'is pervasively represented in the discourse of New Labour as reconciling themes which have been seen as irreconcilable' (ibid:44). Giddens initially seemed to prefer the oppositional discourse (which, like list-making, lends itself well to sloganizing_ such as 'no rights without responsibilities', 'no authority without democracy' (1998:66) but now uses the modifying and conciliatory language which generates conceptions involving the integration and connection of different ideas. This approach

produces notions such as ‘education is the main public investment that can foster both economic efficiency *and* social cohesion’, the third way ‘concerns itself with equality *and* pluralism’ and – in response to globalization – the promotion of ‘global integration’ in pursuit of a ‘healthy global order [which] would achieve a balance between government, the economy and civil society’(Giddens,2000:73,120,123; original italics).

Fairclough (2000:44) offers some instructive examples of a similar kind from Blair’s pamphlets and speeches:

Patriotism *and* internationalism; rights *and* responsibilities; the promotion of enterprise *and* the attack on poverty and discrimination...Cutting corporation tax to help businesses *and* introducing a minimum wage to help the lowest paid...Significant extra resources into priority areas such as health and education *and* tough and prudent limits on overall government spending. Investment *and* reform in the public sector. A key player in the EU *and* hostile to unnecessary centralisation.

Sometimes the stress is on reconciling oppositional themes and sometimes on going beyond such outmoded divisions (typically through ‘partnerships’ of various kinds – another key New Labour theme) but, as Fairclough argues, whatever the strategy it is important to note the gaps between rhetoric and reality in policy and legislation.

Post-Compulsory Education and the Third Way

Apart from an obsession with distinguishing New Labour education policy from that of the previous administration (Coffield,1998), post-1997 strategies have been shaped, in the main, by TW concepts and economic discourse linked to global market themes. Two key policy developments – the University for Industry (Ufi) and the New Deal Welfare to Work (WtW) schemes – represent paradigm cases in this respect.

Although the Ufi *Pathfinder Prospectus* (DfEE,1998b) was published in 1998 as a prelude to the official launch of the Ufi *learn*direct centres in Autumn 2000, the original blueprint dates back to joint research and development (supported by New Labour politicians such as Gordon Brown) by the Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR) and

the University of Sunderland in 1995/96 (Milner,1998). The new organisation is intended to perform the functions of an 'impartial broker' seeking to connect individuals and companies to learning/training programmes rather than being a principal provider, though the Ufl did plan to 'commission initially a limited number of flagship packages in areas of strategic importance'(DfEE,1998b:27). In order to achieve its two main objectives of stimulating the demand for learning amongst employers and employees (particularly those in small firms; Matlay & Hyland,1999) and improving access to and availability of learning opportunities, the Ufl makes extensive use of information and communications technology (ICT) to connect with learning networks of all kinds. There is now a national freephone helpline to supplement the work of Ufl *learndirect* regional centres around the country working to stimulate interest in education and training amongst employers and individuals (Twining,2000a).

The Ufl might have been designed solely by reference to Giddens' TW manual of practical politics. All the key ingredients are there. In the original Ufl blueprint devised by Hillman (1997), three broad strategies to meet the challenges for lifelong learning were considered: *laissez-faire* (free market), *dirigisme* (state direction) and animation (partnership between the state and market stakeholders). It is no great surprise that the 'third option' was chosen. Hillman explains the logic behind this choice:

It is less expensive than *dirigisme* but entails more role for government than *laissez-faire*. It creates expectations and political liability but is much less risky than *dirigisme*. At best it can realise the flexibility and responsiveness of the market while making sure that things happen faster and that commercially marginal groups are not excluded (33).

All the distinguishing characteristics of TW philosophy are clearly on display here: public-private sector partnerships, social inclusion (interpreted mainly in economic/employment terms), prudent handling of the public purse and the regulation of the market in the interests of all members of society. Moreover, this intervention in the market through

the establishment of Ufl *learndirect* centres is – in spite of the brokerage metaphors - quite unlike the marketisation of education and training through the Training and Enterprise Councils (TECs) under the Conservatives (Evans,1992) and much more like the old statist forms of ‘supply-side’ interventions (Robertson,1999).

A broadly similar strategy informed the organisation of New Deal WtW schemes (described by Hodgson & Spours [1999:49] as the ‘central pillar of New Labour’s overall political approach for this Parliament’) which allowed for consortia – involving the regional employment services, local authorities, careers services, colleges, training and enterprise councils, voluntary and private sector agencies – to collaborate in planning and delivering WtW provision (Hyland,1999). There was a commitment to flexibility and an expectation that ‘arrangements for delivery would vary from area to area in accordance with the views of the local partners and the needs of the young people in the area (DfEE, 1997:3). Although there are now a number of different New Deal schemes in operation (for lone parents, people over 50, communities) the flagship WtW project was aimed principally at ‘reducing the number of 18-24 year olds experiencing long-term unemployment...estimated to be 250,000 nationally in May 1997’(Mason,1998:176). People within the age range who have been in receipt of Job Seeker’s Allowance (JSA) for six months or more are referred to a Gateway programme – an intensive period of assessment, guidance and counselling – from which they are directed into one of four main options: unsubsidised employment, subsidised work in the voluntary sector or with the environmental task force, full-time education and training or self-employment (DfEE,1997:14-18).

An overriding priority of WtW schemes for 18-24 year olds is the placement of as many young people as possible into unsubsidised jobs – 40% of Gateway leavers is the official minimum target (and the achieved target is around 43%; Hyland, 2000) – and failure to attend Gateway sessions or take up one of the options can be penalised by the

suspension of young people's JSA benefits. The government is adamant that there will be 'no fifth option of an inactive life on benefit' (Finn,1997:248). Elements of patriarchal morality and coercion are in evidence here as, indeed, they are in the government's general philosophy of lifelong learning (Ecclestone,2000) though, as Tuckett has argued recently, there is such a thing as 'benign compulsion' in the public sphere in relation to health and the environment as well as to learning (Utley,2001a:4). It is also worth noting here that a key difference between the former Conservative and the current Labour perspectives on the ultimate purposes of the learning society is that the former viewed learning for economic competitiveness as an end in itself (see, for instance, DTI, 1994,1995) – justified in terms of a self-sustaining and successful market – whereas the latter policies (though accepting the economic imperative) almost always make connections between economic aims and the further end of fostering the personal development of individuals and wider social cohesion (e.g.,DfEE,1998a:10-11; DfEE,2000b: 8-9).

WtW projects are, of course, central to New Labour's general policies for welfare reform aimed at challenging the dependency culture and radically transforming the welfare state – through what Giddens terms 'positive welfare' – which means 'attacking problems of dependency, isolation and lack of self-fulfilment wherever they arise'(2000:166). Thus, the work relief elements of the New Deal need to be located within the broader framework – typified by programmes for the long-term unemployed, lone parents and the 'new deal for communities' (Social Exclusion Unit, 1998) – of welfare reform which is a 'key part of third way political philosophy' (Giddens,2000:103).

Drawing on the work of Levitas (1998), Fairclough claims that – in terms of the language and politics of social exclusion/inclusion – New Labour has abandoned the old 'redistributionist discourse' in favour of a combination of social integrationist and moral underclass conceptions. The former 'sees exclusion as primarily due to unemployment

and inclusion as getting people into paid work', whereas the latter 'attributes exclusion to deficiencies in the culture of the excluded and inclusion as entailing cultural change' (Fairclough,2000:57). In response to such interpretations, Giddens (2000:103) insists that the old redistributionist policies – along with the old welfare state – are unsustainable because the 'dynamics of inequality are different from the past'. The mechanisms of social exclusion/inclusion are now to be located in transformations in the nature of work, employability requirements and the shifting of welfare systems so as to benefit the most vulnerable and disadvantaged members of society.

Although there are a number of shortcomings in WtW schemes (Hyland,2000), the New Deal for 18 to 24 year olds had, by the end of August 2000, managed to find work for 229,600 youngsters (Educa,2000a:5) and gone some way towards establishing itself as a 'serious programme designed to address unemployment and marginalization for a vulnerable group of people'(Hodgson & Spours,1999:65). In addition, the social inclusion agenda of New Labour's lifelong learning policy – aimed at bridging the 'learning divide between those who have benefited from education and training and those who have not' (DfEE,1998a:11) – has resulted in a range of initiatives for poorer students in further education, homeless people (Educa,1999) and schemes to expand access to higher education for disadvantaged youngsters (DfEE,2000b). None of this is enough, of course, but there is no such thing as a 'quick fix' in this area since 'social inclusion policies are going to have to be sustained year after year' (Twining,2000b:1) to have any lasting or substantial impact. What needs to be added to this is that 'workfare' programmes like WtW are, almost by definition, short-term, transitional and limited in scope (Ormerod,1999).

Education, Social Capital and Community

Notwithstanding all this, there are unmistakable social democratic principles at work in New Labour's social inclusion educational agenda (a concession made even by

trenchant critics of New Labour policy such as Hill, 2000:11). How significant are such principles in terms of overall education policy? It needs to be said that the socio-ethical strands of educational policy are – in terms of both theory and practice, rhetoric and reality – unequivocally subordinate to the economic aims. The social inclusion strand is invariably paired with the employability/workforce skills element of policy: learning secures ‘our economic future’ *and* ‘develops the spiritual side of our lives *and* promotes active citizenship (DfEE,1998a:7), skills policy is designed to foster ‘economic prosperity *and* social cohesion’ (DfEE,2000a:3). However, even though the social purposes are usually placed second, the fact that the links are always made is more than symbolic.

When Giddens (2000:73) argues that ‘a strong economy presumes a strong society’ and follows this up by stressing that the ‘key force in human capital development obviously has to be education since it can ‘foster both economic efficiency and civic cohesion’, the TW underpinnings of current education policy are laid bare. There is clearly an active role to be played in New Labour learning policy by what Schuller & Field (1998:234) call ‘social capital’ which is ‘located in the kinds of context and culture which promote communication and mutual learning as part of the fabric of everyday life’. The ‘cultivation of social capital is integral to the knowledge economy’, Giddens (2000:78) tells us, and adds that the ‘new individualism that goes along with globalization is not refractory to cooperation and collaboration – cooperation (rather than hierarchy) is positively stimulated by it’. All this is explained in terms of the fact that:

Social capital refers to the trust networks that individuals can draw upon for social support, just as financial capital can be drawn upon to be used for investment. Like financial capital, social capital can be expanded – invested and reinvested (ibid:78).

The critics of current PCET policy (Hill,2000; Rikowski,2000; Coffield,1998) argue that

- through WtW projects, Ufl *learn*direct services and Individual Learning Accounts (ILAs)
- there is still too much emphasis placed on individual rather than collective responsibility

for learning, often in a way which frustrates other aspects of the TW social inclusion agenda. As Ainley's (1999:196) passionate condemnation of this aspect of policy puts it:

In the 'learning society' corresponding to the new learning policy, both knowledge and skill are individualised and limited for the majority of an increasingly peripheral workforce to portfolios of lower-level vocational information and competence, while learning is separated from leisure and popular culture.

This is, indeed, a damning critique when levelled against a group of policies within which community involvement and social inclusion are meant to have a significant (if, at times, a subordinate) place.

Accepting the rhetoric/reality gap, Fairclough (2000) points to the influence of 'communitarian discourse' on Tony Blair's policy statements, suggesting that it 'combines Christian socialism and a conservative critique of the individualistic world view of liberalism'(37-8). One of the leading theorists in communitarian philosophy is Etzioni (1995) – according to Levitas (1998), the principal influence on New Labour thinking in general and Blair's ideas in particular – whose key principles have been placed in an educational context recently by Arthur (1998). The main agenda is founded on the belief that:

Neither human existence nor individual liberty can be sustained for long outside the interdependent and overlapping communities to which we all belong. Nor can any community long survive unless its members dedicate some of their attention, energy and resources to shared projects. The exclusive pursuit of private interest erodes the network of social environments on which we all depend (358-9).

Is any of this communitarianism reflected in TW education policy? Certainly, the spirit is well represented in the broad social inclusion and widening participation agenda, and the drive to encourage collaboration rather than competition whilst broadening community representation can be seen in the new rules for the governance of further education colleges (DfEE,1998c). If concrete manifestations of communitarianism are

more difficult to detect, perhaps this is because the reconciliation of social justice with global markets is just very difficult to achieve.

The Prime Minister has recently attempted to link New Deal initiatives with the Human Rights Act, suggesting that the two strands need to be synthesised in constructing the:

important dimension of the debate about the Third Way...between collective action in the pursuit of social justice and the liberal commitment to individual freedom in a market economy (Blair,2000:21).

Can such a synthesis realistically be achieved within a 21st century social democracy?

The Third Way, Education and the State

Whitfield (2000:82) argues that New Labour's 'third way modernisation project is based on a minimum reversal of Tory legislation...the continuation of the Conservatives' transformation of public services'. Continuities between the former Tory administration and New Labour strategies have provided dominant themes in post-1997 educational policy studies. The TW reliance on human capital tenets is said to be 'embarrassingly close to the position taken within many education reports flowing from previous Conservative administrations' (Rikowski, 2000:6) and Esland et al (1999:2) have observed that the 'neo-liberal promotion of free market economic globalisation has continued to provide the overarching framework for Britain's political economy as it enters the new millennium'.

A lot of this appears to be, more or less, on the right lines but it requires further analysis and elaboration. Does it make sense, for instance, to speak of free market globalization as something that can be promoted, or is it something to which all governments simply have to respond? Ball (1999:195) is inclined towards the latter in his argument for:

the need to see the policy continuities between the Conservatives and Labour in an international context and...that in a sense Labour's policies are not specific to Labour at all; they are local manifestations of global policy paradigms.

Fairclough (2000:16) similarly suggests – in accounting for the rhetoric-reality gap in contemporary political discourse – that New Labour is seeking to ‘achieve rhetorically what they cannot achieve...in reality...a reconciliation of neo-liberal enterprise with social justice’.

The view that we are helpless in the face of globalization forces has, however, been subjected to serious criticism in recent years. Green (1997), for example, argues that it is internationalization rather than globalization that faces contemporary systems, and that the prime task for educationalists is to ‘reconstruct cultures of citizenship and nationhood in ways which are appropriate to modern conditions’(186). In a similar way – though addressing different questions – Giddens (1998:129) urges social democrats to ‘seek a new role for the nation in a cosmopolitan world’. In more recent TW analyses, Giddens (2000) – making liberal use of Etzioni’s communitarian ideas – argues that ‘globalization creates favourable conditions for the renewal of communities’ and that ‘civil society is fundamental to constraining the power of both markets and government’(63-4).

There are a number of fundamental misconceptions about the links between nationhood, neo-liberalism and global markets which Gray (1998) seeks to remedy in the assertion that the contemporary ‘model of globalization errs badly in writing off sovereign states as marginal institutions’. He goes on to argue that:

For multinationals, sovereign states are not marginal actors in the world economy whose policies are easily circumvented. They are key players whose power is well worth courting. The leverage of sovereign states may actually be greater in some respects today than it has been in the past (69).

Many of the misunderstandings surrounding globalization are caused by mistaken views about markets, liberalism and the role of governments. As Gray explains, the so-called free market:

is not – as today’s economic philosophy supposes – a natural state of affairs which comes about when political interference with market exchange has been removed. In any long and broad historical perspective the free market

is a rare and short-lived aberration. Regulated markets are the norm, arising spontaneously in the life of every society. The free market is a construction of state power (ibid:211).

There are, in fact, only two periods when a genuinely *laissez-faire* regime within a global market framework existed: in Britain in the 1840s to 1870s and in the USA, Britain and, significantly, New Zealand in the 1980s and early 1990s. Moreover, as Gray explains, even these markets could not have been brought about without active state intervention in the fields of industrial relations, the deregulation of the labour market and a generally proactive fiscal policy. Gray's claim that, from the 1870s to 1914, a spate of reforms was implemented in Britain – typified by what Taylor (1972:57) called the 'patently interventionist 1870 Education Act' – with the aim of 'limiting market freedoms for the sake of social cohesion' (1998:14) serves to illuminate much of current New Labour policy.

British educational history from 1870 to the First World War was characterised by intensive and far-reaching state intervention (Wardle,1976). As Sanderson (1999:26) observes:

it can be argued that the British system of education was so transformed between 1870 and 1914 and especially between 1890 and 1914 that it had become an impressive support for industry rather than a liability.

These arguments are meant to counter mainstream claims that the economic decline of Britain in the last quarter of the 19th century – particularly after Britain's poor performance at the 1867 Paris Exhibition and the subsequent spate of government enquiries into the state of technical education (Musgrave,1970) – was caused by our educational shortcomings. Ashby (1958:50), for example, suggested that 'formal education was a negligible factor' in Britain's industrial strength, a view echoed by Dore (1976). Yet, as Coffey (1992:50) has noted, the 1870 Elementary Education Act had 'primarily an economic purpose' and – in introducing the Bill in the House of Commons in February 1870 - Forster declared that 'upon the speedy provision of elementary

education depends our industrial prosperity' (Maclure,1973:99-100). Reinforcing this general line of argument, Sanderson (1999:29) asserts that:

Before 1890 English education was defective, lacking a proper structure of universities, state and local government finance, technical colleges, free and compulsory elementary education or popular secondary education... After 1890, however, the situation was transformed with free and compulsory elementary education, the restructuring of the secondary system...the elevation of civic university colleges into independent degree granting institutions with state grants from 1889, the spread of the polytechnics, municipal technical colleges and City & Guilds examinations...

There are clear parallels between this end of the 19th century state interventionism in education and New Labour's lifelong learning policies implemented at the end of the 20th century. In spite of the lack of evidence about general social – as opposed to individual – rates of return to investment in education and training (Murphy,1993; Dore,1997), investment in education is once again proposed as a panacea for all kinds of economic and social ills. There is also, of course, the fact that – whereas the educational system is amenable to reform with the possibility of immediate and tangible results – the economy and general social order are not quite so malleable. However, the pace of reform between 1997 and 2000 has been formidable and can only be characterised in terms of its centralist and interventionist tendencies (Selwyn,2000; Avis,2000).

Hodgson & Spours' (1999:136) analysis of recent education policy concludes with a criticism of New Labour for 'its reliance on voluntarist initiatives which, while practical and focused on the needs of the excluded, may not in the final analysis work effectively because of system barriers'. In terms of government interventions, a distinction is made between 'weak frameworks' which place 'responsibility on individuals to access the type of learning opportunities they require to improve employability and enter the labour market', and 'strong frameworks ' which 'provide structures within the education and training system which support genuine individual empowerment' (ibid:137). The Ufl and voluntary employer training policies are cited as instances of the 'weak' approach,

whereas a unified post-16 funding system, a unified curriculum and a strengthened national framework for Modern Apprenticeships are examples of 'strong' approaches (changes in Modern Apprenticeships are now an integral part of the new skills agenda; DfEE,2000a:10-11).

This is an interesting analysis though it leaves much to be said. New Deal WtW schemes are not mentioned specifically in this context but – on any reading – such workfare programmes can only be characterised as strong interventionist policies designed to remedy social exclusion and disadvantage. Moreover, could it not be said that the Curriculum 2000 proposals aimed at post-16 qualification reform and the forthcoming wholesale re-organisation of the PCET sector under the Learning and Skills Council (Educa, 2000b:4) are paradigm examples of strong, centralist policies? And similar claims might be made about recent policies aimed at helping the most disadvantaged students in further and higher education.

A plausible explanation of the differential and sometimes contradictory analyses of TW educational policy is that, for critics of neo-liberalism, state interventions are almost never enough, whereas for critics of statist polices, any government intervention smacks too much of centralist control. Green's (1990) investigation of the role of education systems in state formation demonstrated that there is no such thing as a state which does not manipulate its education system in the pursuit of certain ends; there are only relative degrees of manipulation and control. Given all this, perhaps an additional role for TW policy is to try to steer a (necessarily circuitous) path between the Scylla of voluntarism and the Charybdis of coercion in PCET policy. Contemporary lifelong learning policy is, arguably, currently weighted towards the latter rather than the former course of action.

Conclusion

New Labour PCET policy in general and TW strategies in particular cannot – without qualification and circumspection - be described as neo-liberal. Such policy is more accurately classified as being representative of a teleology of economic activity determined by a range of wider social and cultural purposes which was explained by Robbins (1952) through the use of the German concept of 'Harmonielehre'. If current political strategies appear to more to do with economic than social capital, then this can be explained in terms of the need to respond to both the ideological legacy of the New Right and the globalizing forces which generate the diversity of neo-liberal attempts to reconcile the oppositional forces which TW politics is designed to address. New Labour education policy is more centralist than that of the previous Conservative administration and, moreover, needs to be so to develop the strong frameworks which, as Ainley (1999) and Hodgson & Spours (1999) argue, are essential to the development of lifelong learning policies based on democracy and social justice. Academics and researchers who are quick to attack the centralism of New Labour in relation to curriculum policy (Wragg,1998), lifelong learning initiatives (Tight,1998; Ecclestone,2000) or educational research (Walford,2000; Utley,2001b) might do well to reflect on the question of exactly how much state direction is required to enable schools and colleges to fight social exclusion and promote genuine community participation and equality of opportunity at all levels.

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